

Ms mind expanded, the position of his mother and grand-

parents gradually became desperate. All the savings, even

the Auberts' funds, were exhausted; the lawsuits still

dragged on, entailing heavy costs, which drained the home

of all resources. Already in 1855, the rent in] the Eue

Bellegarde proving too heavy, it became necessary to take

a cheaper lodging on the Cours des Minimes. Then, early

in 1857, that also was found too dear; and two little rooms

were rented at the corner of the Rue Mazarine. They over-

looked the Barri,¹ a lane-like *chemin-de-ronde* encompassing

the old town, with small and sordid houses on one hand.

and the crumbling ramparts on the other.
Here black ruin fell upon the Zolas and the

Auberts.
The aged but active grandmother toiled to the

very last,
managing the household. raising money on

goods and chattels, resisting the wolf at the door with all the

energy of
despair. Bit by bit, every superfluous article of

furniture
was sold; remnants of former finery were

carried to the wardrobe dealers, to obtain the means of

purchasing bread and paying Smile's college fees. As for

the lawsuits, they remained in abeyance from lack of funds.

And following blow, poor Madame Aubert could at

last resist no
longer, but sickened and died. That happened

in Novem-

ber, 1857. During the previous month Smile
Zola had
returned to the college, entering the second
class. Towards
Christmas his despairing mother started, alone,
for Paris, to
implore the help of some of the personages
who had formerly
favoured her husband. The old and almost
helpless
Monsieur Aubert remained at Aix with his
young grand-
son, who, after an anxious period of
suspense, received

¹ From the mediaeval Latin, *larrium* (Ducange).